

Division and Diversion

Gil Rugh

Senior Pastor, Indian Hills Community Church in Lincoln, Nebraska

I have selected nine current issues for this booklet which are gaining momentum in both the world and the Church. Each of these movements are widely accepted by the world and are subtly making their way into the Church. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, are commanded to be alert to what is taking place in the world around us, and my hope is that this study will make us more aware of the issues we are facing.

The New Age Movement

In the January 1990 edition of *Moody Monthly*, Erwin Lutzer was right on target when he wrote:

“To make matters worse, various aspects of New Age thought will continue to infiltrate the Church under the guise of psychology, the science of mind, and inner healing. The Bible will be reinterpreted to show that it agrees with the essential teachings of New Age thought.”¹

I am convinced the New Age Movement will only become more of an issue for the Church in the coming years.

The heart of New Age thinking is basically pantheism, the idea that all is God and God is everything. As believers we immediately react against that kind of teaching because we know that God is the Creator, separate and distinct from His creation. Yet, this philosophy continues to infiltrate the minds of Christians because **out of it comes the concept that people have power and ability in and of themselves.**

The “power of positive thinking,” the idea that there is some inherent force within each person, coincides with this. Proponents teach that through the exercise of one’s thoughts and mind you can change yourself and your world. In subtle ways this idea begins to infiltrate our thinking. We begin to respond to teachers who are promoting what is really a New Age concept, but this idea is based on a doctrine that is contrary to the Word of God.

An example is meditation, a New Age doctrine that has infiltrated the schools, and now the business world is being infiltrated as well. What makes meditation so deceptive is that it is presented as a non-religion. Advocates exclude the religious aspects, that all is God and you are a god, but they try to teach everything else: “By visualizing something, you can help bring it to pass. Visualize what you want. Visualize what you want to accomplish.”²

Visualization, meditation. **It is all related to the concept that you have the power within you as you visualize something to bring it into existence.** There are some well-known, well-accepted teachers in the evangelical church who are promoting this teaching today.

The New Age Movement is something the Church needs to be aware of. We become concerned about its influence in other areas like the schools and business, but we ought to be *very* concerned about its influence in the Church, lest the Body begin to accept this kind of doctrine.

The Charismatic Controversy

As I cover the various issues, you will see that they often overlap and tend to blend together. This is very significant. An area I believe is directly touched upon by the New Age movement is the charismatic movement.

An article in *Time* magazine noted that throughout the 1980s the moral backslide has been a national obsession. Many have come to believe that a panacea, or universal remedy, is at hand--the New Age movement. Believing the New Age movement will save the world, they have placed their faith in it. They are rediscovering the emotional side of themselves. They have come to believe that channeling and speaking in tongues assert the validity of the irrational.

¹ Erwin W. Lutzer, “Nine for the ’90s: No Longer Secular,” *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p. 15.

² Edith L. Blumhofer, “Nine for the ’90s: The Gift Rift,” *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p. 15.

Do you see how different doctrines blend to prepare us for an acceptance of something that is contrary to Scripture? **Both the charismatic movement and the New Age movement have prepared us for the “acceptance of the irrational.”** Both movements bypass the mind. Speaking in tongues and speaking to the dead are nonintellectual ideas. You cannot explain them. You do not understand them. Your mind has been excluded from the process. As soon as you move into that realm, you open the door for all kinds of problems, but unbelievably in spite of all this, there is a growing acceptance of the charismatic movement among evangelicals today! “We are tired of conflict,” they assert. “Let’s emphasize love and what we agree on rather than what we disagree on. Let’s stop being ‘fighting fundamentalists’ and begin to express our love in a more real and tangible way.”

One must admit that there are elements of this argument that deserve attention, but we ought to be very aware of the danger here as well. At its root, this is the same teaching the New Age Movement is feeding us: “There aren’t any major differences. We are all part of the same universal oneness. Let’s focus on that. Let’s cooperate together to bring peace.”

I am not saying that charismatics want to adopt the doctrines of the New Age Movement. What I am saying is that in the end result, both groups are saying some of the very same things.

The January 1990 *Moody Monthly* article notes:

“By the 1920s, the conservative, dispensational wing of fundamentalism had closed ranks to eliminate any biblical basis for Pentecostal experience by denying the validity of signs and wonders in the post-apostolic Church.” It was the dispensational theologians who led the way to show that the signs and wonders of the Pentecostal movement were contrary to an accurate theology of the Bible.”³

The article goes on to say, however:

“In some segments of evangelicalism, charismatics and non-charismatics seem to be moving toward peaceful co-existence, stressing their agreement on fundamental doctrines, their aggressive concern to proclaim the Gospel to nonbelievers, and their passion to renew the Church. All the while they are ignoring key differences of belief in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”⁴

The key differences in belief are broader than just the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The article closes with this statement about the Pentecostal movement:

”Because it speaks to the felt needs of many men and women, meets emotional and psychological needs, and expresses itself in the popular cultural forms, it generally defies efforts to eliminate it.”

Note carefully this last statement. Because the charismatic movement meets emotional and psychological needs and fits in with what is going on in our culture, it becomes very difficult to eliminate. What is absent here? The standard of the canon! The word “canon” means law. **God’s Word is the yardstick by which everything is to be measured and evaluated, but the Church is bypassing that and instead “meeting people’s needs.”**

We are living in a need-oriented society. Everybody wants to talk about their needs. Since the charismatic movement offers to meet needs, people rush to it.

To see how catastrophic this can be, look at what has happened to the media ministries in the past few years. How are those ministries validated? Their confirmation comes through people who stand up and give glowing testimonies of what God has done for them. These ministries validate what is being done by the testimonies of individuals’ experiences rather than by a careful study of the authoritative Word of God. An experience becomes the authority for the Church, not the Scripture.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The charismatic movement is going to be a growing problem for evangelicals in coming years. People in the Church struggle with this issue because there seem to be so many attractive things about charismatics, and it appears somewhat hard and calloused just to take out the Bible and say, "Well, this is what the Scripture says. What they are doing does not meet the scriptural qualifications. Therefore it is not acceptable." We want to say, "Well, yes, it doesn't match Scripture--but look at what is happening!"

Confronting the charismatic movement is something you will not be able to escape as a believer. It is a major issue that brings us in direct conflict with other believers. As we will see in another area, it becomes a rallying point, regardless of theology. Did you ever wonder why Presbyterians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Episcopalians--any denomination you can name--can all get together in major charismatic conferences? Because they eliminate any doctrinal issues except one common experience of what they call "the work of the Holy Spirit." This is something we need to continually guard against.

The New Paganism

Another issue the Church of Jesus Christ will have to deal with is "religious pluralism." This is the idea that since there are many peoples and many religions, there must be an acceptance of them all. The end result is the elimination of Bible-based values and biblical standards. Pluralism serves as the excuse for this abandonment.

For example, you cannot have a view on abortion that is derived from the Judeo-Christian Scriptures because you live in a pluralistic society, and it would not be fair to those who are of another conviction to impose foreign ideas upon them. What is not honestly faced in this kind of logic is that *someone's* ideas and beliefs *are* being promoted! Even in a pluralistic society, only *some* people get their way.

The United States is experiencing a change in society. Where once there was a general agreement on standards and beliefs, now there are no standards--a condition that is acceptable to most everyone except those with biblical convictions! The result is that we as Christians find ourselves more and more the objects of attack. We are more and more on the defensive.

In Leslie Keylock's section of the *Moody* article, he comments, "The majority of articles and books on religious pluralism being written today do not defend the idea that Christianity is God's divinely revealed truth."⁵

Of course not! Those who do hold to the exclusive truth of Christianity become the "narrow ones who are opposed to progress." Even the general tenor of religious pluralism is working against us as believers today, and that will become more and more severe.

The Role of Women

Another major issue is the role of women. Momentum continues to grow behind the world's view of the woman, and little by little the Church begins to absorb the world's thinking.

Francis Schaeffer wrote that to see where the Church will be in the next ten years, look at where society is today. You can see that pattern in all areas--certainly in the role of women. As society has changed its view on the biblical roles, the Church has gradually adapted and reinterpreted the Scriptures to arrive at the same view.

The fact that for centuries the biblical roles of man and woman were not even issues for the Church ought to wave a red flag for believers. Now they are saying we have been all wrong. Now we are to pursue egalitarianism--an equality that implies "sameness." The Church is being pushed into radical change.

The *Moody* article brings up the example of a Bible college in which a woman got up to speak in chapel and some of the students walked out in protest. "What is going on?" he asks. Is it true that when Paul forbids a woman teaching and being in authority over men in 1 Timothy 2, that it only related to the cultural setting? Was it a situation that was restricted only to Ephesus? If so--and he asks the question--"Where do you go to get an authoritative norm on roles

⁵ Leslie R. Keylock, "Nine for the '90s," *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p. 17.

today?”⁶ You can dismiss any part of Scripture, if you are just going to cancel it out by describing it as a difference in “culture.”

It is not just the role of women that the Church is confused about. Turn on the talk shows on Christian stations. They are telling men how to become more sensitive, more warm, more open, and on and on. Today, society is promoting a feminization of the man along with the masculinization of the woman. That is fitting with this androgynous society. That is where society is moving because the world does not see any difference in the sexes. The world aims to make the men as much like the women as they can and the women as much like the men as they can; then there will be true equality. No, this may be true *sameness*--though even that is pretty unlikely--but not true equality. If your feet are not planted in the Scripture, you will get swept along with the tide of what the world is doing. **Even when your feet are planted in the Scripture, it is a battle to hold the line when it seems everyone else is going a different direction.**

As believers we need to be aware of these things. We are under the relentless pressure of the world. **The more broadly accepted the non-biblical view becomes, the more isolated biblical believers will become.** As this happens more pressure will be put on us by those who say, “Can’t we do something different with the Scriptures that will enable us to be accepted more in the mainstream of our society?”

Of course, there is always the danger that we will lock into a traditional interpretation of Scripture that is more tradition than interpretation. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit when we examine the Scriptures and study them. We also need to be careful not to come to the Scriptures to see if we can make a change in them that will allow the Church to fit with the world. The more the Church fits, the less power it has because it is depending less on the One who is the power.

Missions

Some monumental changes are taking place on the mission field as well:

“After almost 200 years of Western dominance, world missions is in the process of being turned upside down in one of the most cataclysmic revolutions in the history of the Church. Consider the facts. Christianity in much of the non-Western world has been growing at a phenomenal rate--and this at a time when the Church in Europe and North America is having difficulty growing at all. For example, from 1970 to the present, the Church in Africa experienced an increase of almost 100 million members, while the Church in North America had an increase of less than 20 million.”⁷

Note those numbers: The Church in Africa grew at five times the rate of the Church in North America in the last twenty years!

“Numerically, evangelical Christianity is now stronger in the Third World than it is in the West. In 1970, 64% of the world’s evangelicals were in the West (including eastern Europe)...Only 20 years later, the percentage of evangelicals living in the Third World had increased to 66%...Churches in non-Western countries have now sent out more than 30,000 missionaries...By the year 2000 the number of missionaries from the Third World will reach 100,000, which would equal the present missionary force from North America.”⁸

Do you see the change that has occurred? In just 20 years the world population of evangelicals has flip-flopped, from 64% of evangelicals being in the Western world in 1970, to 66% in Third World countries in 1990.

The center of Christianity is undergoing a shift, but that is not a signal of the demise of the Church of Jesus Christ! It just means that our responsibilities as believers in America will become somewhat more difficult and more challenging. We will be ministering the Word in the midst of a declining civilization, should Jesus Christ tarry.

⁶ Richard S. Sisson, “Nine for the ’90s: New Opportunities, Many Questions,” *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p. 18.

⁷ David J. Hesselgrage, “Nine for the ’90s: From Pupils to Partners,” *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*

I do not believe in the downfall of the Western world because of what I know about biblical prophecy, but it fits well with prophecy that if Jesus Christ delays in His Second Coming, evangelical Christianity may well be washed out in the Western world. **When He returns, the Western world may be a mission field, rather than a mission sender.** We seem to be on the brink of that in many ways already.

Ecumenicism

The article, “Evangelical Ecumenism--The Price Of Unity,” in the January 1990 *Moody Monthly* is a very good article written by Richard Mayhue, who is on the staff at The Masters’ Seminary in Los Angeles, California.

Up to this point in time, evangelicals have been wedded together because of their commitment to the inerrant Word of God and the doctrines that come out of the Word. Now there is pressure for us to broaden our thinking and to accept other positions. Mayhue notes:

“Signs, wonders, and miracles serve as a major rallying point for the uniting of Protestants outside the charismatic fold: charismatics, Pentecostals, and Roman Catholics. Lausanne II this past summer gave a platform to those who believe that apostolic-like miracles must precede powerful, contemporary evangelism...Efforts will increasingly be made to discover common ground and minimize biblical and historic differences between Catholics and evangelicals.”⁹

This is one change I have seen and experienced first hand in the church I pastor. In the early years of my ministry, it was relatively simple to attack anti-biblical Roman Catholic doctrines, but when I do that today, there is a significant response from people who believe it is an unloving, unacceptable approach. “We don’t want to be known as those who are divisive and against others,” they say. “No, we want to be loving and accepting of others.” **The Roman Catholic doctrines have not changed, however. They are just as godless and anti-biblical as they were in the days of the Reformation.** What has changed? The evangelical Church!

The world’s idea of ecumenism--the ecumenism that evangelicals have stood against over the years--has begun to break down our resistance as it bombards us constantly. We begin to look for ways to compromise, and the first step toward compromise is, “Just don’t say anything against it.” Do you know what the second step is? “Let’s accept it. After all, we haven’t been preaching against it, have we?”

At any time, we are only two steps away from accepting what we once stood against as being unbiblical. We have seen this in the areas of marriage, divorce, and morality. We feel the pressure. If someone preaches against homosexuality, “He lacks love!” If he preaches against divorce, “He doesn’t understand the pressures of our society!” If he preaches against immorality, “He doesn’t understand what poverty does to a person!”

These excuses have nothing to do with it. The issues are: **What does God say is sin, and where does the Church of Jesus Christ stand?** One may well ask, “Does it stand for *anything*?” The threat of ecumenism grows while the Church tarries.

It is also very difficult today to preach against the anti-biblical practices of the charismatics. I did that often twenty years ago, but now it’s “unloving.” It’s “divisive.” It’s “offensive.” Why? **Is truth truth?** Are we afraid to stand for truth? “Oh,” they say, “we don’t want to offend--we don’t want to divide.”

Mayhue concludes, and I concur:

“Unity at any level that pleases God and advances His kingdom will not be at the expense of His Word or character. On the other hand, unity at the expense of God’s Word is not true unity; unity at the expense of God’s character is not holy unity.”¹⁰

The pressure to capitulate will only grow stronger in the future. Spiritual discernment and biblical discipline race to the top of the evangelical imperatives for the coming years.

⁹ Richard Mayhue, “Nine for the ’90s: The Price of Unity,” *Moody Monthly*, January 1990, p.23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Psychological Subversion

Issue number seven is psychology and the Church. Today, anyone who views psychology as incompatible with biblical Christianity is separated from much of evangelical Christianity and viewed negatively for taking such a strong stand. However, the other side takes just as strong a stand.

A local Christian radio station has taken the Bible teaching program, “Sound Words,” off the air. They have also taken “Grace to You” with John MacArthur off the air. What was the objection? The stand on psychology. To me it is a biblical issue. Evidently it is a biblical issue from their viewpoint as well: That anyone who opposes the mixing of psychology and the Bible must be removed from the airwaves. Psychology is a serious issue. It is not a matter of having two different views of the Word. They are opposing views that cannot blend. I say **you cannot mix psychology and the Bible and still have a biblical view.** They say you cannot hold this view and be biblical.

Turn on the Christian radio station and see if psychology dominates the programming. A local station ran two days of programming by James Dobson and Gary Collins, encouraging young people to go into the study of psychology. Their response to those who oppose the mixing of psychology and the Bible was, “Who is going to help people in future years if our young people don’t go study psychology?”

When I was a young person growing up, radio preachers said, “Who will help people in the coming years if young people don’t go study the Word of God?” Now we get two days of programming, repeated three times throughout the day, saying, “Who will help mankind if young people don’t go study psychology?”

I cannot help but think of Israel’s problems in the Old Testament. They always wanted to run to the Egyptians for help. If they found themselves under pressure or facing difficulty, their response was “Go call the Egyptian army!”

Read 2 Kings 1. The king gets injured. He falls in his palace. Does he call for the prophet of God? No! He sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron. God intervenes with His own prophet, saying, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” (2 Ki 1:6). God chastises Ahaziah for seeking out the false gods of the world. That is just where the Church of Jesus Christ is turning today: “Let’s call upon men’s ideas, men’s thoughts, men’s influence, to get real help.” Bible teaching is ultimately eliminated.

Observe for yourself. What have the radio stations replaced Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee with?

“J. Vernon McGee has gone to be with the Lord. He was good,” they say, “but we think we ought to have a Bible teacher who is more up-to-date.”

“Who are you going to replace J. Vernon McGee with?” we ask.

“Well, uh, we feel there is a better quality Bible teaching program than Gil Rugh and Sound Words,” they say. “Fine. Praise the Lord! Who are you going to replace J. Vernon McGee with?” we ask.

“Uh, well, we feel there is a better program than John MacArthur’s Bible teaching,” they say.

“O.K., but *who are you going to replace J. Vernon McGee with?*”

Tune in and listen to the programs that have replaced the Bible teaching that has been taken off. Suddenly there is no room in the schedule for Bible study, but there is room for James Dobson three times a day. There is room for Mimirith and Meier. There is room for this family program and that family program.

The isolation has begun to set in. The influence of psychology will continue to be a battle for the Church of Jesus Christ. It will not go away. People say, “Look, haven’t we fought this enough? Can’t we just go on?” But you see what happens? The other side does not just “go on.” It is not a dead issue to them any more than it is to us. They continue to pump psychology out. They continue to pull Bible teaching off the air. They continue to tell people that anyone who says you should not mix psychology with the Bible is doing a disservice to the Church of Jesus Christ. This battle will become increasingly unpleasant.

Pragmatism

In the past, the question of Church standards was answered with, “What sayeth the Scriptures?” Today that question has been replaced with “What works?” Are people being reached? Are people being helped? Are people getting saved? These have become the standards, rather than the Scriptures. How big your church is determines whether you are a good authority on what ought to be done. The current practice, rather than the truth, becomes the standard.

A man who pastors one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States is a man of mixed-bag theology. As far as I can tell, he is a believer. This man is conducting a pastor’s conference at Dallas Seminary and Fuller Seminary, and he is conducting a pastor’s conference for Robert Schuller. Now, tell me, what gives theological integrity to that mixed-bag? Dallas Seminary, Fuller Seminary, and Robert Schuller can all use the same man to do a conference for pastors to tell them how they ought to conduct the ministry before God? Something is radically wrong! “But hey-he has built one of the largest churches in the country. What more do you want?”

What about theological integrity, for starters? **Are we talking about drawing a crowd, or are we talking about building the Church of Jesus Christ?** If you want a crowd, put on a rock concert! But **crowd-pleasing is not the foundation for the true Church.** People point out, “Well, isn’t he a believer?” Yes, that’s the first step. But is he a believer with theological integrity? Is he a believer with moral integrity? Those issues have to be resolved.

Pragmatism presses in upon us. It affects us. We look around and see other churches and say, “They are growing. Maybe we ought to do this.” We can make adjustments. We can change the lectern. Fine. We can change the time of service. Fine. But we cannot change the fact that we are called to minister the Word of God.

Division

The last and most important area for us to be aware of is evangelical division. I believe we live in a day when we are going to see major division in the evangelical Church. To my understanding it is a cycle the Church goes through. Evangelical Christianity moves forward. It grows. It becomes more diverse. It becomes more encompassing. Then it breaks apart as in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy of the 1920s.

The part that breaks off is always smaller. At the end of the 1800s, the major denominations--Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and so on---were the evangelicals, standing for the faith.

If you read the great theologies of the last century, you will find that they were written by great Presbyterian theologians. You sure would not want to get any theology from most Presbyterians today. What happened? There was a break off, and those who were committed to the inerrancy, the sufficiency, and the authority of the Scripture had to finally pull back and take a stand. This comprised the smaller group. The majority in the major denominations have continued on to this day.

We see that cycle repeating today. **It is less and less acceptable to take a stand on the absolute, final authority of Scripture.** It is too “narrow,” too “black-and-white.” We see another cycle coming around. Another break-off looms. People will say, as they did in the past, “They are too narrow--it has to be their way.” “If you don’t see it his way, then you don’t fit.” But **the issue is: *What does the Scripture say? Is the Word of God our authority, or not?***

“Well, I know lots of people who were helped by...” they say.

Many people have been helped by the Mormons, but does that validate Mormon theology and practice? Should we incorporate that into the Church of Jesus Christ? I understand people in Utah, which has a large Mormon population, live longer. Perhaps we should start preaching the Book of Mormon! How ridiculous!

That is what happens when you set up a man-made standard. Once you have opened the door, how do you close it again? If it is okay to mix the insights of psychology with Scripture, who decides what insights from psychology to include? Minirth and Meier? Larry Crabb? James Dobson? Norm Wright? Clyde Narramore? Jay Adams? Gary Collins? Who decides?

What about someone who starts to bring in teaching that seems unsound? “Well, we ought to stand against that,” you say. Oh? Who gets to decide what ideas we stand against? If the Word of God is not the authority, we have opened the door to everything!

A situation at Fuller Seminary demonstrates this. When Paul King Jewett, who is still one of their seminary professors, took certain unorthodox positions on the apostle Paul’s authority, the authorities at Fuller Seminary explained, “He was only sacrificing Paul’s authority in certain limited areas.” But do you know what has happened with the passing of time? That area has expanded and expanded so that today it has infiltrated the entire school. Fuller Seminary had no foundation to deal with it. That is what happens to the Church of Jesus Christ.

I clearly see evangelical division coming. **It is not that I like to fight, but I do like to be biblical.** We as the Church of Jesus Christ have to be.

Our One Consuming Passion

I attended a conference recently. I met with another pastor who shared with me his purpose in ministry: “What my ministry is all about is people!” he said. “The reason why I am in the ministry is people!”

You know what my conclusion was? He has not been called of God to ministry! The prophets of the Old Testament did not say, “What I am driven by is people. I am here for the people, to meet the needs of the people, to do this or that for the people.” No. The prophets were driven by the Word of God.

As a pastor I must be consumed with a passion for the Word of God! Why should men be in the ministry? They should be in the ministry because they have a passion for the Word that cannot be controlled. We have turned the Church into a hospital, which some people think it ought to be. Their supposed purpose of the Church--“to meet the needs of people”--is a lie! It is a corruption of the Lord’s purpose for the Church.

The reason we are here is to minister the eternal truth of God so that Almighty God might be honored and glorified. By His grace, the needs of people are met out of the ministry of the Word. As soon as you put people above the Word of God and the God of the Word, you have a ministry that has become man-centered. That is what has happened in the Church of Jesus Christ. We no longer have a God-centered ministry. We no longer have a Bible-centered ministry. We have a *people*-centered ministry which touches our heartstrings, and we feel we are doing something good. But have you ever realized that the world is doing the same thing?

In 1 Tim 3:15 Paul says, “I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

What is this truth we are to support? Jesus said in His high priestly prayer, “Thy Word is truth.” **So what does the Church stand for? The truth of God. Is there any flexibility, any variation in our stand? No!** That does not mean that we all have the same interpretation of every situation or passage, but we must come to it with the basic premise that **this is the inerrant, authoritative Word of God that is to be interpreted literally, historically, and grammatically.**

Our responsibility as believers is simple: We are to be the pillar and support of the truth. Through the years to come, may we always be aware of this vitally important fact.